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Emotion Elicits the Social Sharing of Emotion:  
Theory and Empirical Review

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Abstract

This review demonstrates that an individualist view of emotion and regulation is untenable. First, I question the plausibility of a developmental shift away from social interdependency in emotion regulation. Second, I show that there are multiple reasons for emotional experiences in adults to elicit a process of social sharing of emotion, and I review the supporting evidence. Third, I look at effects that emotion sharing entails at the interpersonal and at the collective levels. Fourth, I examine the contribution of emotional sharing to emotion regulation together with the relevant empirical evidence. Finally, the various functions that the social sharing of emotion fulfils are reviewed and the relevance of the social sharing of emotion for emotion scientists is discussed.

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Emotion regulation in children is universally recognized as an interpersonal process since the advent of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Harlow, 1959). In contrast, prevailing concepts for emotion regulation and emotional coping in adults are generally devoid of a link with interdependency or social relationships (Dunahoo, Hobfoll, Monnier, Hulsizer, & Johnson, 1998)—e.g., problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), personal agency (Bandura, 1982), meaning-making coping (Park & Folkman, 1997), and emotional expression and suppression (Gross, 2007). Current views thus imply that in the course of their development, individuals eliminate social dependence. To become mature adults, individuals should demonstrate their ability to regulate adaptation problems independently of external intervention. Such an assumption fits prevailing values of Western psychological science that emphasize autonomy and separation over relationality (Gilligan, 1982; Sampson, 1983). In psychological research, the healthy individual is largely seen as one who is “self-contained, independent and self-reliant, capable of asserting himself and influencing his environment” (Riger, 1993, p. 280). This view was termed “rugged individualism” (Riger, 1993), or the Lone Ranger, “man against the elements” perspective (Dunahoo et al., 1998). It pits man against the elements in a fight for survival. In such a context, control and action are highlighted whereas social and communal aspects of coping are ignored (Riger, 1993).

The present review demonstrates that in the field of emotion and regulation, a rugged individualist view is untenable. I proceed as follows. First, taking a close look at the developmental course, I review the knowledge and abilities acquired by children with respect to emotion regulation, and I then question the plausibility of a developmental shift away from

social interdependency in this respect. Second, based upon an examination of the impact of emotional experiences, I show that there are multiple reasons to predict that emotional experiences in adults open upon social interaction and emotion sharing and I review the evidence in support of this prediction. Third, I formulate theoretical propositions predicting that any private emotional experience entails a number of consequences at the interpersonal level, as well as at the collective level, and I review the supporting facts. In a final step, I advance theoretical considerations on the contribution of emotional sharing to emotion regulation and I examine the relevant empirical evidence. I conclude by briefly reviewing the various functions that the social sharing of emotion fulfils and by discussing the relevance of emotion scientists taking the social sharing of emotion into account.

### **Interpersonal Emotion Regulation in the Developmental Course:**

#### **Is a Shift Away from Interdependence Plausible?**

##### *The Developmental Course of Emotion Regulation*

Interpersonal processes contribute to children's emotion regulation in many different ways. First, newborns signal all their discomfort and needs by emitting emotional signals. Caregivers react to these signals with regularity and continuity thereby bringing the infants' emotional arousal back to a baseline. Once an attachment is established between an infant and a caregiver, the infant actively seeks the caregiver in a distressing situation. The caregivers' presence, contact, and comfort efficiently appease the infant's emotional state (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Harlow, 1959; Sroufe & Waters, 1976).

Second, by appeasing children, caregivers also allow them to explore threatening situations and to develop the cognitive tools necessary to prevent further emotional stress. In this sense, caregivers' actions not only constitute preconditions to children's physical and

psychological survival, but also grant them access to the world. Infant rhesus monkeys raised in social isolation chronically avoided incoming stimuli by upholding an encapsulated posture and by sheltering their sense organs (Harlow, 1959).

Third, whereas mammals essentially make use of body contact for regulating their offspring's emotion, human beings also employ language. Long before children are able to understand any speech, adults talk to them in distressing situations: they label the situation and the resulting experience, clarify causes and effects, suggest remedies, formulate regulation advice, and propose ways of coping. What is obvious from lay observation in this regard was fully confirmed in recordings of parents' and doctor' speech in a routine pediatric consultation in which children aged 9, 15, 18 or 21 months old underwent a vaccination shot (Claes & Rimé, 2008). Childrens' emotional consciousness thus emerges in the context of adults' words and sentences. Such a context gives children guidelines for event appraisal, emotion labelling, and perception of bodily changes, emotional responding, regulation, and coping.

Fourth, caregivers endow children with cultural information and meanings necessary to protect them from the impact of the mysterious and hazardous world in which they live (Becker, 1973) and to shelter them from the distressing impact of raw reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Such knowledge structures allow them to face the world with no fear and even with relative confidence.

Fifth, adults' conversations expose children to a social environment replete with narration and stories. An average of one story is told every seven minutes of recorded adult conversation in the presence of children (Bruner, 1990; Heath, 1983; Miller, 1982). Recorded stories predominantly resulted from situations in which shared beliefs had been violated—i.e., from emotion-eliciting situations. While they are listening to adults' accounts, children learn to discriminate everyday events from exceptional ones, to discover both what should normally

occur and what might happen, to enlarge their theoretical knowledge about the world, to exploit the negotiation of meaning that adult accounts entail, and to develop negotiating skills in turn when they are facing events that did not evolve as they had anticipated (Bruner, 1990).

Sixth, children are actively trained to develop a capacity that is unique to mankind: they learn to become narrators (Fivush, 1994; Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 1999). They gain the capacity to inform their conspecifics about what happened to them, to exchange comments about this experience, to inform them of what their needs are in this regard, and how they should be taken care of. This capacity also allows children to negotiate with others *ex post facto* the appraisal—the meaning and the implications of situations they encountered. By the same token, children inform others of what may happen, of how one might react, of what the consequences of such a situation may be, and of the actions to be taken to prevent similar situations from occurring in the future. The benefit of the capacity for the development of a shared knowledge on emotional situations and emotional experiences is thus immense.

### ***What was Learned?***

This quick review of the developmental course regarding emotion regulation demonstrates the accumulation of regulation-relevant knowledge and abilities that children acquire in this process. To sum up, children learn that interpersonal processes (1) have soothing capacities with regard to emotional distress, (2) can help them to cognitively confront and process distressing elements, which helps to reduce these elements' distressing power, (3) can help them to verbally apprehend and comprehend emotional experiences, (4) generate cultural knowledge and meanings appropriate for protecting them from the emotional impact of existential conditions, (5) endow them with stories and narratives replete with information on what may happen and how one might negotiate the meaning of such situations, (6) offer them the opportunity to share their emotional experiences with others, to

exchange comments and point of view on such experiences, and by the same token, to contribute, in their turn, to the shared knowledge on emotion. In sum, children progressively gain the capacity to enter their own experiences of failed expectations into their cultural narrative, and to propose possible explanations or meanings for these experiences. They learn to bring their own stories to the cultural construction that shelters them, and thus to join in the continuous effort through which members of their community strive to consolidate the securing dome under which they all live.

### *The Subsequent Developmental Course: Two Contrasted Hypotheses*

Two hypotheses can now be contrasted with regard to the subsequent developmental course. On the one hand, an individualist view predicts that this complex process involving the development of interpersonal contacts, of social exchange, and of collective constructions about emotional experiences vanishes at adolescence. To become mature adults, young people abandon social interdependence and instead develop their ability to regulate adaptational problems independently of any external intervention. On the other hand, I claim that the various processes of interdependent emotion regulation in the developmental course do not vanish. On the contrary, initially restricted to parental caregivers, children are progressively exposed to a broader social circle during adolescence and adulthood. This circle essentially involves elective attachment figures such as friends and romantic partners. From this perspective, interpersonal contacts, social exchange, and collective constructions about emotional experiences as they emerge in childhood simply represent consecutive developmental products that pave the way to interdependent practices that lie at the very core of adult emotion regulation. As is the case among children, interdependent processes buffer adults' emotions, stimulate adults' cognitive processing of emotional experiences, increase adults' personal knowledge about emotion, and contribute to the strengthening of their



interpersonal relationships and social integration. Above all, interdependent processes nourish the construction of a massive knowledge base and the production of meaning pursued collectively in every culture since the dawn of human awareness.

A few simple questions can help decide which of these two views is more plausible. Why would the developmental course involve such remarkable emotion regulation tools if the fate of these tools is to vanish at the edge of adult life? Why would the developmental course progressively grant children the tools appropriate for contributing to social knowledge, to meaning production, and to cultural constructions about emotions if the fate of these tools is to be substituted with the Lone Ranger attitude? And how would the thousands-years-old cultural construction be pursued if the Lone Ranger attitude is systematically adopted among adolescents? I first review successively theoretical and empirical arguments in support of my alternative hypothesis. Thereafter, I examine the consequences that emotional experiences entail among mature individuals. This will generate multiple theoretical arguments in support of my hypothesis.

### **Consequences of Emotional Experiences**

Let me first stress a major and often overlooked characteristic of human emotion. In the animal world, emotional responding ends when emotional circumstances vanish. When a predator pounces on its prey, intense emotional displays result in the surrounding flock. For example, once a cheetah has caught an antelope and carries it away leaving the scene, the other antelopes return to their grazing activities as if nothing had happened. No preoccupation or trouble of any kind is manifested in their behavior after the incident. Human beings differ diametrically from animals in this respect. In our species, any emotion leaves long-lasting cognitive and social consequences. This is the case not only for important life events and for traumatic emotional experiences, but also for current life emotions such as joy, anger, fear,

sadness, shame, and the like. Animal models that inspired emotion research (e.g., Cannon, 1917, 1927; Darwin, 1872; MacLean, 1949; Ekman & Friesen, 1972) are simply blind to these consequences. Hereafter, I will focus first on the consequences that negative emotions involve, and then on the consequences that positive emotions entail.

### ***Consequences of Negative Emotions***

Human beings are continuously engaged in goal-reaching activities (see Fig. 1a). Negative emotions occur when circumstances interfere with these activities. If the pursuit of a goal is substantially slowed down, or if it is blocked, this results in a negative emotional state (e.g. sadness, anger, fear, shame, etc.) (Carver & Scheier, 1990, 2001). Yet, current views generally ignore that such a state is no more than the visible part of an iceberg. A negative emotional state fuels cognitive work. It also stimulates social exchange. In addition, it activates the attachment system.

***Negative emotions fuel cognitive work.*** Goal-reaching activities rely upon two complementary capacities: (1) the capacity to predict states of the world and the consequences of one's action, and (2) the capacity to control situations and to bring forth states of the world one had planned (see Fig. 1a). Exerting these capacities presumes a continuous reliance upon a large knowledge base that individuals possess under various formats—schemas, models of the world, implicit theories, world views, assumptions, and so forth. Dotted lines in Figure 1a, represent how a feedback system links goal-reaching activities and the knowledge base. Thus, when conditions interfere with the pursuit or attainment of a goal, components of this knowledge base are invalidated. When elements of individuals' experience disconfirm aspects of their' schemas, models, theories, or assumptions (Fig. 1b), a state of cognitive dissonance results. This leads to the prediction that negative emotions necessarily are at the beginning of cognitive efforts toward dissonance reduction (Festinger, 1957).

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Such reasoning was anticipated by classic authors. Hadley Cantril (1950) viewed emotions as occurring when people confront events for which their assumptive world did not prepare them. He states that in situations that challenge people's world comprehension, emotions supply a search for meaning. Similarly, Georges Kelly (1955) maintains that emotions take place in moments when events "do not stick" with constructions that one applies to them, thus compelling individuals to modify these constructions. Both Cantril and Kelly view emotion as sparking cognitive work.

Research on conditions that initiate cognitive work led to very similar considerations. Hastie (1984) demonstrates that deviation from an expected course of events offers the most basic instigation of causal reasoning. Kruglanski (1996) views cognitive activity as typically initiated when a discrepancy is perceived between an actual and a desired state. Martin and Tesser (1989) argue that when the progression toward a goal is blocked or when a discrepancy occurs between the current state of affairs and the expected situation, conditions for the development of a ruminative cognitive activity are met. That such conditions relate to emotion was made evident by Mandler (1984) who posits that two types of conditions can cause emotion: when something which was not expected occurs, or when something which was expected does not occur. Thus, conditions eliciting emotion overlap those eliciting a cognitive search. Dissensions, surprises, unexpected events, incidents, accidents, and even catastrophes all mobilize attention to the production of meaning. When forecasts fail, when expectations are disconfirmed, when activities in progress are blocked, meaning production emerges at its best (Weick, 1995).

Numerous data confirms that negative emotions fuel cognitive work. After a negative emotional event, people engage in an active information search—as made clear in laypersons’ behaviors after the 9/11 attacks (Rimé, Delfosse, & Corsini, 2005). Memories of negative events also resurface into consciousness under the guise of intrusive thoughts, mental images, or mental rumination (Martin & Tesser, 1989; Tait & Silver, 1989). Mild laboratory-induced emotions readily elicited this effect (Horowitz, 1969; Horowitz and Becker, 1971; for a review, see Horowitz, 1992). Everyday emotions elicit recurrent thoughts in the subsequent days and weeks in 95% of cases (e.g., Rimé, Philippot, Boca & Mesquita, 1992). Traumatic episodes especially provoke recurrent intrusive recollections months or even years after the event (e.g., Bawnes, Gorman & Sayer, 1991; McCammon, Durham, Allison & Williamson, 1988; Tait & Silver, 1989; Weisaeth, 1989; Wilkinson, 1983). In the aftermath of collective emotional events, such as the assassination of a nation’s president (e.g., Curci, Luminet, Finkenauer, & Gisle, 2001), the death of a king (e.g., Finkenauer, Luminet, Gisle, El-Ahmadi, Van der Linden, & Philippot, 1998), the death of a princes (e.g., Hornstein, Brown, Mulligan, 2003) or dramatic events such as 9/11 in New York (e.g., Luminet, Curci, Marsh, Wessel, Constantin, Gencoz, & Yogo, 2004), event-rehearsal proliferates and is demonstrated to mediate the formation of the memory of the event (Finkenauer, Gisle and Luminet, 1997). Altogether, these various observations support the proposition that negative emotional experiences fuel cognitive work.

***Negative emotions stimulate social comparison, narration, and conversation***

Individualist biases lead people in our culture to be convinced that their sense organs are essentially the source of their information. This is markedly incorrect. In the developmental process, children continuously combine two sources of information: their sense organs and people around them. It is this double reliance which allows them to label, categorize, understand, and endow objects and events that they come across with meanings. That this

process does not vanish among adults was particularly well-captured by what Festinger (1954) termed social comparison. Under this concept, Festinger addressed the fact that individuals are continuously motivated to assess their own perceptions and opinions. To this aim, they compare their views with those of the individuals around them. Through this process, individuals reach agreement upon world views, values, opinions, concepts, and so forth. Their social consensus produces a social reality which is as objective as objects themselves. Social comparison is especially at work when people lack objective standards or when they face a confusing experience. As evidenced by the cognitive work they elicit, emotional experiences typically constitute confusing experiences and they are thus expected to stimulate social comparison.

Schachter (1959) demonstrates that being exposed to an emotional condition elicits a person's motivation to seek social contact. In his classic studies, participants who were anxious at the prospect of being administered electric shocks expressed a preference for waiting in the company of other persons whereas those for whom the threat was low preferred to wait alone. This "stress and affiliation" effect generated considerable research (Cottrell & Epley, 1977). Schachter himself adopted a social comparison explanation of the effect. In his view, individuals facing stress would attempt to reduce the elicited anxiety by verbally interacting with others sharing the same fate thereby using others as a gauge for evaluating their own emotional state. Schachter's view leads to the inference that negative emotions will fuel verbal exchange and social comparison.

Schachter was not alone in viewing emotion as opening up social communication. Bruner (1990) regards narration as playing a central role in the context of emotional circumstances. In his perspective, no story can emerge as long as events fit common sense expectations. Motives for narration come forward only when expectations are violated—which overlaps with the definition of emotional circumstances adopted in this article.

According to Bruner, a story aims to provide unusual circumstances with a form which makes sense and renders them understandable. It is particularly well-suited to bridging the exceptional with the ordinary. Thus, Bruner said, if you come across an exception to what is normally the rule, and if you ask people to explain what happened, their answer generally takes the form of a story. A motive or an intention is brought forth and a possible world is sketched in a context in which the encountered exception makes sense. In line with this view, it can be posited that a negative emotional experience stimulates the production of narration.

In his theory of social representations, Moscovici (1984) stressed that members of a group continually nourish conversations in social life. In doing so, they converge towards common representations and shared knowledge. Thus, conversation is *the* tool by which people expand an implicit stock of images and ideas which they then take for granted. Unfamiliar or atypical objects or events instantly trigger a feeling of chaos among individuals because such objects or events shatter the basis upon which mutual comprehension rested. Moscovici viewed the production of social representations as the optimal means for absorbing such threats. Through conversations, social thinking transforms unfamiliar objects or events into social representations. Emotional events, therefore, fit the conditions described by the theory of social representations. They question what was taken for granted and they compel people to reconsider the grounds upon which their beliefs rested. The theory of social representations thus leads to infer that emotions stimulate conversation in social life.

***Negative emotion, distress, and attachment.*** When a condition interferes with the pursuit or attainment of a goal, the resulting invalidation of elements of the person's knowledge base extends to the self-system who coordinated components of this knowledge base with plans and actions (see Fig. 1b). As a result, the self is weakened. Its "deflation" is manifested in reduced self-confidence, reduced feelings of self-efficacy and lower self-esteem. In everyday life, individuals behave in a context of apparent order and meaning. By

disconfirming expectations, models, and world views, negative emotions undermine this delicate architecture. Traumatic situations have been shown to be particularly deleterious in this regard (Epstein, 1973, 1990; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Parkes, 1972). But any emotion has some impact on this symbolic architecture because emotion develops precisely at its fissures—or where things are unexpected or get out of control (Corsini & Rimé, 2007; Epstein, 1973, 1990). By making fissures apparent, emotion makes individuals feel the weakness of the construction, thereby eliciting a wave of collateral emotional feelings: anxiety, insecurity, helplessness, estrangement, alienation, loss of self-esteem, and so forth. In sum, besides the *obvious* emotional state itself, negative experiences induce a *subtle* effect—an effect which is most often overlooked. Negative experiences entail a temporary destabilization of the person, a generalized distressing condition that a person is highly motivated to reduce.

Though he favored a social comparison explanation of his “stress and affiliation” effect, Schachter (1959) also considered other motives to be at play. He mentions emotional support, or direct distress reduction through the presence of others. Shaver and Klinnert (1982) advocate that the work on stress and affiliation yield data fully consistent with findings from research on attachment initiated by Bowlby (1969). This research (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Sroufe and Waters, 1976) indeed provided ample evidence that both primate and human infants seek contact with others at times of uncertainty and distress. Bowlby (1969) himself defines attachment as a resource that children activate when in distress. Shaver and Klinnert (1982) note that this early form of affiliation was found to serve two distinct but related functions: direct anxiety reduction and increased cognitive clarity. They concluded that for both human and nonhuman primates the relationship between distress and affiliation is maintained throughout life. This leads me to contend that the generalized

distress that negative emotions produce motivate adults to search for emotional support and to turn to their attachment figures for this purpose.

**Conclusions.** Negative emotional conditions leave a large wake of cognitive and social consequences behind them. Negative emotions initiate a state of cognitive dissonance and are thus at the beginning of important cognitive efforts toward dissonance reduction. Ample data already exist in support of the general hypothesis that emotions fuel cognitive work. But, intrapersonal manifestations in the context of information search, mental rumination, intrusive thoughts, or search for meaning do not close the list of the consequences that negative emotions entail. For multiple reasons, negative emotions stimulate social interaction in many forms: social comparison, story-telling and narration, conversation, and last but not least, a search for emotional support through contact with attachment figures, or their elective substitutes in adulthood.

Substantial evidence shows that mentally or socially reactivating the memory of an emotional experience rekindles response components of this experience, such as mental images, associated feelings, bodily sensations, and physiologic arousal (e.g., Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Rimé, Noël & Philippot, 1991b; Schaeffer & Philippot, 2005). Thus, talking about a negative episode should involve an aversive experience and individuals should avoid doing so. Yet, the theoretical reasoning has opened up strong arguments in the opposite direction. Before examining what the relevant empirical evidence reveals in this regard, let me turn to positive emotions.

### ***Consequences of Positive Emotions***

Positive emotions result from circumstances which facilitate goal-reaching activities. They develop when the pursuit of a goal is substantially accelerated and is attained sooner than anticipated (Carver & Scheier, 1990, 2001). When this occurs, the subject's knowledge



base is proved efficient and his or her theories and models are supported. By the same token (Fig. 1b), the self-system is strengthened and manifests an enhanced self-confidence, stronger feelings of self-efficacy and a higher self-esteem. Positive emotions thus enhance a subject's well-being in two different ways: (1) by the increase of the level of positive affect that they entail and (2) by the positive feedback that a successful experience brings to the knowledge base and the self.

As is the case for past negative episodes, re-accessing past positive episodes revives related feelings and sensations. Consequently, thinking back or talking about a past positive emotional experience elicits pleasurable emotional feelings. This leads up to the hypothesis that people are motivated to mentally ruminate upon positive episodes that they have experienced. Experimental studies conducted long ago by Horowitz and colleagues (Horowitz, 1969, 1975; Horowitz & Becker, 1971, 1973) support this expectation. They exposed participants to either a positive emotion-inducing movie or to a negative one. In a post-film observational session, participants had to signal the occurrence of movie-related thoughts or mental images while completing a mental task. Compared to a neutral movie condition, participants who had seen an emotionally-arousing film evidenced significantly more frequent thoughts and mental images. The respective impact of emotionally-arousing positive and negative movies was perfectly comparable in this regard. That positive emotional experiences elicit mental rumination as frequently as negative emotional experiences was later confirmed in several studies in which the recall of autobiographic emotional episodes was investigated (Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991a; Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992). To illustrate, as was the case for episodes of sadness, fear, or anger, episodes of joy or of love-affection were ruminated in more than 90% of occurrences (Rimé et al., 1991a, study 2). Thus, there is little doubt that positive emotional experiences fuel subjects' thinking.

Langston (1994) views positive emotional episodes as opportunities on which to seize or “capitalize”—he notes that Bryant (1989) used the term *savoring* in this respect. Langston adds that capitalizing on positive emotional experiences can be achieved by seeking social contacts and letting others know about the event. These situations would offer another opportunity to enhance one’s positive affect. In two different studies, Langston confirms that communicating positive events to others was indeed associated with an enhancement of positive affect far beyond the benefits due to the valence of the positive events themselves. Gable, Reis, Impett and Asher (2004) confirm these findings. In addition, they observe that close relationships in which one’s partner typically responds enthusiastically to capitalization were associated with higher relationship well-being (e.g., intimacy, daily marital satisfaction). Thus, sharing positive emotions not only boosts individuals’ positive affect, it also enhances their social bonds.

To sum up, for multiple reasons, negative emotional experiences stimulate social interaction and communication of the experience. Such a social process develops despite the fact that talking about a negative episode involves a markedly aversive experience. As regards positive emotional experiences, such restraint is irrelevant. On the contrary, the research suggests that positive emotions are savored and capitalized upon, that a good way to achieve this capitalization is to talk about them, and that doing so is beneficial to existing links with those with whom such an experience is shared.

### ***Conclusions***

The theoretical analysis of the consequences of negative and positive emotions leads to predict the following. For very different reasons, both negative and positive emotions stimulate important social interaction. More specifically, I predict that, independently of the type or valence of the emotions involved, an emotional experience elicits the social sharing of

this experience. Because the consequences of emotions examined in this section hold independently of the specificities of the personal characteristics of those who experience an emotion, this prediction should hold whatever the subjects' gender, education, or culture. In the next section, relevant empirical data are reviewed.

### **The Social Sharing of Emotion:**

#### **Empirical Evidence**

I first define what the social sharing of emotion encompasses. Next I review basic evidence that emotions are socially shared. I then turn to the exceptions: When is the social sharing of emotion eluded? Finally, I examine the temporal evolution of the social sharing of an emotional experience.

#### ***What is the Social Sharing of Emotion?***

At a street intersection in town, a car hits two youngsters riding a motorbike. The two severely wounded victims are lying down. In a minute, the crowd of gaping people around them is so dense that the ambulance stops at a distance and the medics can hardly get through. Particularly striking is the following fact. Most witnesses are using their cellular phone. They are reporting the emotional scene on-line to a close person. This anecdotal observation illustrates the fact that people who experience an emotion then evidence an imperious need to share it and to talk about it. Before the advent of cellular phones, this need was first expressed on-site. Witnesses talked to one another, and when back home, they again talked about the scene with their intimates. These various situations illustrate what I call "the social sharing of emotion", a process that takes place in the minutes, hours, days, even weeks and months—and sometimes years, or even an entire life—following an emotional episode. The process entails a description of the emotional event in a socially-shared language by the person who

experienced it to another (Rimé, 1989; Rimé et al., 1991a). In its full form, the social sharing of emotion occurs in discourse, when individuals communicate openly with one or more persons about the circumstances of the emotion-eliciting event and about their own feelings and emotional reactions. In attenuated forms, it consists of latent or indirect communications in which the addressee is present only at a symbolic level, as is the case with letters or diaries.

### ***Social Sharing of Emotion: Basic Evidence***

***Autobiographic data.*** The first studies which tested this prediction relied upon autobiographic data. Participants were instructed to recall and briefly describe an emotional experience from their recent past corresponding to a specified basic emotion (e.g., joy, anger, fear, shame, or sadness). They then answered questions about their sharing of this episode: Did they talk about the episode with others? With whom? How long after the emotion? How often? (Mesquita, 1993; Rimé, et al., 1991a, 1991b; Vergara, 1993). Eight independent studies of this type were reviewed (Rimé et al., 1992). They involved 1384 emotional episodes reported by 913 respondents ranging in age from 12 to 72 years. The data showed that, according to the study, 88 to 96 % of the collected episodes were socially shared. The modal pattern for an emotion sharing was to be initiated early after the episode, with the first sharing round taking place during the day the episode happened in about 60% of the cases across studies. Modal responses also indicated that participants talked about the event “several times” with “several persons”, suggesting emotion sharing to be a repetitive process involving a variety of targets. Extent of sharing (i.e., number of repetitions and number of recipients) was positively correlated with the rated intensity of the emotional experience: The more intense the emotion was, the more participants talked about it. Thus these early data strongly supported the view that “every emotion tends to be socially shared”. Obviously,

however, the ex-post facto nature such data were at risk of being unduly inflated. Respondents might indeed have selectively remembered episodes that they did socially share.

*Diary studies.* Diary methods were then used in order to reduce the time elapsed between the emotional episode and data collection. Participants completed a short questionnaire every night before going to bed. They briefly described the event that had affected them most that day, they rated it on emotion scales and they then answered questions about this event, including questions concerning social sharing. This procedure reduced risks of selective and reconstructive biases and allowed collecting data for current life emotion of low or moderate intensities. Several studies of this type were conducted (Rimé, Philippot, Finkenauer, Legast, Moorkens, & Tornqvist, 1994). Previous autobiographic studies consistently showed that an emotion is shared on the day it happens in about 60% of the cases. Consequently, diary-reported daily emotional episodes were expected to be shared before the next night for approximately 60% of them. The findings were precisely in line with this prediction. To illustrate, in one of the diary studies, emotional episodes were collected from 34 participants during 14 consecutive nights (Rimé et al., 1994, study 2). On average, 58% of the 461 events reported were shared the day they happened. With the exception of a marked trend indicating less sharing for cases of shame, this result did not vary as a function of specific emotions. To conclude, findings from diary studies in which the interval between the episode and its recall is at maximum one day, replicated those from autobiographic studies involving intervals of weeks, months, or even years. Thus, it does not seem that findings from autobiographic studies can be explained by selective or by reconstructive memory biases: social sharing behaviors appear to be a typical consequence of exposure to emotion, even if the emotion is mild.

*Follow-up procedures.* This conclusion was further tested using “follow-up” procedures. Having the investigators “pre-select” a target event prevented any selection bias

by respondents. Participants were contacted when they were exposed to some important emotional event and they were then followed up for several weeks. In six such studies, the target emotional episodes involved respectively (a) bereavement, (b) an important examination; (c) first blood donation; (d) attending the dissection of a human corpse among medical students; (e) performing first dissection; (f) first delivery for young mothers (Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998). In each of these studies, follow-up questionnaires assessed the occurrence of social sharing immediately after the event and again at various time intervals. All the follow-up studies offered evidence consistent with earlier findings. Social sharing occurred during the week following the episode at rates closely matching those of autobiographic studies (i.e., around 90% of the cases across studies). With the exception of blood donation, which is a relatively minor emotional episode, the proportion of episodes that still elicited sharing during the second week was virtually the same as in the first week. Marked decreases were then generally observed in the following weeks or months. Steeper extinction slopes were found for less intense emotional events. Altogether, these findings in which selective memory biases were precluded confirmed that people who were exposed to emotion engage in social sharing.

***Experimental data.*** As this proposition clearly involves a causal relation, experimental tests needed to be conducted. Three conditions of emotional intensity were induced in the lab by exposing participants to short movie excerpts (3 minutes) of respectively high, moderate, or low emotional intensity (Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead, & Rimé, 2000). These movies were proved comparable for the type of emotion elicited. Volunteer students participated with a friend. One member of each pair was randomly assigned to view one of the movies while the other completed a filler task in another room. After the movie, the target-participant and friend were brought together in a waiting room and left alone. Their conversation was unobtrusively tape-recorded. Independent judges later rated the recordings

for time of movie-related talk and for the proportion of words referring to the movie. Three independent experiments based upon this model showed that compared to participants in the two other conditions, those exposed to the highly emotional movie talked more about their experience. To illustrate, nearly 40% of the words spoken by these participants referred to the movie, as compared to less than 5% of the words spoken by those in the other two conditions. Thus a 3-minute emotional movie suffices to elicit social sharing. In all three studies, the moderately intense movie failed to elicit more sharing than the non-emotional control one, which suggested that social sharing occurs only when an intensity threshold is exceeded. Additional analyses revealed that individual differences in emotional reactions to the movies were markedly correlated with the extent of social sharing: the more participants were emotionally aroused by the movies, the more they talked about it in the waiting room. In one of the studies, participants came back to the lab two days later and rated their sharing in this elapsed period. The results paralleled the waiting room findings, thus supporting their ecological validity.

Altogether, these experiments demonstrated that being exposed to an emotion elicits the social sharing of this emotion, thereby confirming autobiographic, diary, and follow-up findings. In a recent study, social sharing of dreams was examined (Curci & Rimé, 2007). Data showed that the intensity of the emotion experienced in a dream was the better predictor of the extent to which the dream was socially shared.

***Generality of the social sharing of emotion.*** Studies consistently show that the social sharing process is initiated early after the eliciting event, that it is generally repetitive, and that it is addressed to several target persons. The generality of these social consequences of emotion is largely supported (for reviews, see Rimé et al., 1992, 1998). Social sharing of emotion occurs independently of age and gender. Contrary to common stereotypes, women were not found to be more prone than men to share their emotions. In addition, neither the

type of basic emotion involved nor the emotional valence affected the proportion or extent of sharing. Fear, anger, and sadness were shared as widely as happiness or love. However, as will be discussed later, shame and guilt were the exceptions and were shared to a lesser degree (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998a). Despite arguments that putting emotion into words might be a function of verbal abilities or education, the propensity to share emotions was comparable whether people held a university degree or had an elementary school education (Curci, Rimé, Gisle, & Baruffol, 2007; Zech, Rimé, De Soir, Versporten, & Van Oyen, 2007). Cross-cultural comparison also failed to evidence significant differences for the rate of sharing, which occurred with comparable importance across European samples (e.g., Belgium, France, the Netherlands, the Basque Country in Spain, Italy), across samples of immigrants in Europe (from Surinam, or Turkey) (Mesquita, 1993), or across populations as diverse as Asian (South Korea, Singapore, India, Japan) (e.g., Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001; Yogo & Onoe, 1998) and North American (e.g. Rimé, Yogo, & Pennebaker, 1996). Yet, the way people shared fluctuated broadly. Latency, recurrence, or target all varied considerably with culture (e.g., Singh-Manoux & Finkenauer, 2001).

***Intensity of emotion and extent of sharing.*** The notion of social sharing of emotion opens upon the prediction that the more an episode is emotional, the more frequently it will be shared. Thus, a positive linear correlation is expected between the intensity of emotion elicited by emotional episodes and the extent to which episodes are shared. Studies of autobiographic recall involving nine independent samples from eight nationalities offer a moderate support of the predicted relationship (Rimé et al., 1998). Observed correlations were significant and positive, but in the low range—Pearson  $r$ 's ranged from .21 to .35. Laboratory studies in which error variance was better controlled yielded considerably higher coefficients. Data from eight laboratory studies relating the intensity of laboratory-induced emotion and the extent of its sharing in the next few days indeed provided coefficients ranging from .30 to



.63. The curve relating intensity of emotion and extent of sharing manifested a step-function rather than a linear one. Extent of sharing increased at moderate levels of emotion and reached a ceiling at higher levels. As I will discuss later, this ceiling effect might result from the fact that listeners limited their availability to the sharing process.

*Targets of social sharing.* Who are the targets that people select to share their emotions with? Interesting trends emerge from the comparison of age groups (Rimé, et al. 1991a, 1991b, 1992; Rimé, Dozier, Vandenplas, & Declercq, 1996). Children aged 6 and 8 who had been exposed to an emotion-eliciting narrative later manifested virtually no sharing with peers in their classroom. Yet, most of them did share the episode with their father and mother when they were back home. Other family members were rarely involved in the sharing of emotions in this age group.

Preadolescents (8 to 12 years old) were surveyed after a night game at summer camp in which, according to the children's ratings, the game induced a moderate intensity emotion in them. They went back home the next day. Three days later, parents' ratings of their child's sharing showed that the night game had been shared by 97% of the participants. Parents clearly emerged as the privileged sharing partners —mothers in 93% of the cases, and fathers in 89% of the cases. Siblings served as recipients in 48% of the cases, best friends in 33%, peers in 37%, and grandparents in only 5%.

Among adolescents (12–18 years old), family members, and predominantly parents, were by far the most often mentioned sharing targets both among boys and girls. Friends were the recipients of about one-third of emotional sharing. Romantic partners were rarely mentioned, either because there was none, or because they were not yet eligible as sharing partners. But, as age cohorts became older, friends—including girlfriends, boyfriends, and female best friends—became increasingly important. Other people were rarely mentioned.

Among young adults (18–33 years old), the role of family members was considerably reduced, especially among males. As a counterpart for both genders, spouses and partners emerged as important actors on the social sharing stage whereas friends maintained the same importance as in the adolescents' data. The role of family members decreased again in middle-aged adults (40–60 years old) perhaps in part because parents are no longer available. Additionally, a considerable drop in the importance of friends occurred for male adults, but not for females. In this age group, spouses and partners markedly predominated as sharing targets. In men in particular, the spouse or partner was virtually an exclusive target among more than three-quarters of them. Data collected on elderly people (65–95 years old) simply replicated this pattern. From adulthood on, spouses and partners became the main sharing targets (over 75%), followed by family members (over 30%), and friends (about 20%). As previously mentioned, other categories, such as strangers or professionals, were rarely addressed (less than 5% of the cases).

In sum, across age groups, targets of social sharing were consistently found to be intimates (i.e., parents, brothers, sisters, friends, or spouse/partner). Non-intimates hardly played a role in the sharing process. Professionals (e.g., priests, physicians, teachers, psychologists, etc.), unfamiliar, or unknown persons were unlikely to be selected for this role. In both genders, a remarkable evolution was observed with age in selected targets. Attachment figures (father and mother) are the focus of social sharing of emotion in childhood. As was predicted in the first section of this review, sharing targets progressively evolve from parental figures to newly-elected attachment figures, such as friends among adolescents, friends and spouses/partners among young adults, and predominantly spouses/partners among mature adults.

These conclusions are somewhat qualified by observations regarding professional rather than personal emotional episodes. Hospital nurses working in emergency units or in

coronary care units were asked with whom they shared emotional episodes that occurred in their work (Laurens, 2000). Results revealed that in this case colleagues and other professionals were the primary sharing partners. Intimates were also involved in the sharing process, but were addressed to a lesser extent. In another study, police, medical and psychosocial intervention personnel involved in a rescue operation after a deadly train crash were surveyed. Though they had shared their emotions about the catastrophe primarily with their spouses/companion (61%), the primary sharing partners were their colleagues and members of their team for 39% of them (Zech, Ucros, Rimé, & De Soir, 2002). Colleagues can thus play an important role in sharing after professional situations, perhaps because they are seen as more knowledgeable.

**Conclusions.** Data collected through a variety of methods confirm my prediction that both positive and negative emotional experiences elicit a process of social sharing of these experiences. Individuals narrated their experiences in an overwhelming proportion of cases, and their modal response was that they shared the same episode several times with several people. As predicted, this behavior was observed independent of emotional valence or of the type of emotion. In addition, social sharing manifestations occurred at a comparable rate among people varying in gender, education, and culture. In line with these predictions, data demonstrated that the intensity of an emotional experience increased the frequency with which it was shared.

The generality of these findings suggests that emotional sharing is a basic component of emotion, together with appraisal, expression, bodily changes, action tendencies, and the like. Data unambiguously confirm that emotional interdependence does not vanish with age. From adolescence on elected attachment figures succeeded natural attachment figures in the social sharing of emotion. Parental caregivers were found to be the privileged sharing partners among children. Adolescents progressively turned to elected attachment figures, with friends

becoming important sharing targets. Among young adults, romantic partners became the main focus. Finally, among both male and female adults, spouses or romantic partners—core figures of adult attachment (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver (2007)—were the predominant sharing target. These observations radically challenge the Lone Ranger individualist view which predicted that at adolescence individuals would forevermore abandon social interdependence in emotion regulation.

### ***When is the Social Sharing of Emotion Eluded?***

Despite empirical arguments that support the generality of the social sharing of emotion, there are, of course, exceptions. At least three types of circumstances can be seen to restrain the social sharing of emotion. First, when an emotional episode elicits self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt, these feelings counteract the propensity to share emotion. This observation follows from the fact that the phenomenal experience characterizing such emotions is a wish to hide or disappear (Lewis, 2000). People who experience shame or guilt are thus expected to actively refrain from further exposing themselves and they avoid narrating these experiences to others.

A second situation in which a phenomenal experience can counteract the propensity to share an emotion is found in extremely intense or traumatic emotions. On the one hand, in line with the fact that more intense emotional experiences are shared more extensively, extremely intense and traumatic emotional experiences should also be shared more extensively. On the other hand, the notion of trauma (e.g., Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as described in DSM-IV, American Psychiatric Association, 1994) implies that the cues associated with a traumatic experience elicit avoidance. Such a response will most likely interfere with the propensity to share emotions. This leads to expect the occurrence of a behavioral compromise between these conflicting motivational forces. Whereas individuals

would talk frequently about a high intensity or traumatic episode through which they have lived, they would refrain from mentioning the most sensitive issues, thus leaving definite blanks or holes in their narration.

Finally, although emotion elicits a need for social sharing, the social environment might not be receptive. In particular, members of the social environment may limit or even deny the social sharing of emotion for their own protection. This should occur when the episode to be shared involves elements that are likely to elicit harmful emotions among listeners. I now turn to the empirical findings relevant to each of these three issues.

***Shame and guilt.*** Investigating emotional experiences that people keep secret tested the hypothesis that shame and guilt play a critical role in restraining the social sharing of emotion. In two different studies, participants answered questions either about emotional memories that they had socially shared, or about emotional memories that they had kept secret (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998a). The assumption was that the participants would answer questions about secrets provided that (1) absolute anonymity would be granted, and (2) participants would in no way be asked to reveal their secret. The results consistently showed that neither the intensity of the emotion felt when the event occurred, nor the intensity of the emotion still felt when responding, discriminated shared from non-shared episodes. Also, non-shared emotional experiences were no more or no less negatively valenced than shared ones. However, in line with my prediction, non-shared emotional episodes elicited more intense feelings of shame and guilt than shared ones in each of two studies. In addition, emotional appraisal ratings revealed that emotional experiences that were kept secret involved greater personal responsibility for the event than shared experiences. Finally, data revealed that non-shared experiences were initially associated with attempts to hide one's feelings or emotions, a tendency typical of shamed persons (e.g., Tangney, 1991). These findings thus support my prediction that when an emotional episode elicits self-conscious emotions such as

shame and guilt, these emotional feelings counteract the powerful propensity to share emotion.

***Extreme intensity and traumatic emotions.*** Findings converged in showing that traumatic emotions are frequently shared (e.g., Pennebaker & Harber, 1993; Sydor & Philippot, 1996) and that approximately 80% of trauma victims manifested the need to share their experience (e.g., Ersland, Weisaeth, & Sund, 1989; Mitchell & Glickman, 1977). But, what about blanks or gaps in social sharing? A survey of a large group (N = 1,027) of adults exposed at various degrees to a catastrophic gas-pipe explosion in 2004 in Belgium provide relevant findings (Zech, & al., 2007). In this cohort, frequency of sharing about the disaster was a linear function of the intensity of PTSD symptomatology. However, when sharing modalities were examined in more details, marked differences discriminated between participants who fulfilled the criteria for PTSD from those who did not. The former mentioned much more frequently than the latter aspects (1) that they had never shared, and (2) that they did not want to share. Thus, in conformity with the prediction, people who were most affected by an event shared their emotion as often as those who were less affected. Yet, they also evidenced marked proclivities toward not revealing at least some aspects of their traumatic experience. It is probable that these undisclosed aspects are particularly critical with regard to the post-traumatic symptomatology they developed. Future investigation should explore further the content of undisclosed aspects of traumatic exposure. More generally, studies of the social sharing of emotion should focus more on the aspects of traumatic experience which people keep secret.

***Social constraint.*** Studies of responses to collective trauma found enhanced levels of social sharing and of manifestations of solidarity in the affected community within a period of two to three weeks following the traumatic event. After this emergency stage, a sharp drop in social sharing is generally observed. Yet, solidarity is still manifested at a high level for

another month. Two months after the event, solidarity begins a slow decline and spontaneous sharing disappears from the scene (Pennebaker & Harber, 1993; Gortner & Pennebaker, 2003; Collins, 2004). At this stage, individuals who are still inclined to share their experience find themselves rejected. Thus, in their study of the Loma Prieta earthquake, Pennebaker & Harber (1993) observed important social sharing in the week following the disaster. As time went on, survivors still wanted to talk, but they did not want to listen to others sharing their earthquake-related thoughts and emotions about the disaster anymore. At this point, they started wearing t-shirts that read, "Thank you for not sharing your earthquake experience." Thus, receptiveness can work against the propensity to share emotions, a phenomenon which Pennebaker & Harber (1993) labeled "social constraint."

Both seriously ill patients and victims of life events often find themselves confronted with social constraint. In particular, cancer patients claim that expressing their illness-related issues are particularly problematic to them and disturbing to others around them. Only half of these patients were satisfied with the social support they received (Peters-Golden, 1982; Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1979; for a review see Lepore & Revenson, 2006). Similarly, a majority of victims report unhelpful behaviors from their social environment. They were exposed to minimization, rude remarks, and the like, which discouraged them from sharing (Lehman, Ellard, & Wortman, 1986). In interviews with patients in chronic pain, lack of understanding and lack of listening from their intimates were mentioned among the most common difficulties in their lives (Herbette, 2002; Herbette & Rimé, 2004). Data confirmed that nurses, as well as patients' families, try to avoid or to limit geriatric patients' discussions about death (Kastenbaum & Aisenberg, 1972). A majority of healthy people said that they would do their best to cheer up cancer patients if confronted by them (Peters-Golden, 1982). Yet, they generally viewed emotional expression as non-adaptive for suffering persons, and they considered that sharing was not beneficial to them "because it might shatter their will to

fight” (Peters-Golden, 1982; Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1979). It is clear that although the need for sharing emotion is particularly compelling among patients suffering from severe illness, potential listeners often exert social constraints in this regard. People who are particularly in need of social support and social integration are precisely exposed to social signals in the opposite direction.

**Conclusions.** The findings confirm that a narrator’s experience of shame and guilt is the source of restraint in social sharing and favors secrecy. The findings also confirm that a traumatic response to an extremely intense emotional episode is the source of both frequent sharing as well as blanks or gaps in this sharing. Finally, many findings confirm that members of the social environment limit or deny the social sharing of emotion when they anticipate being exposed to harmful emotions.

### ***Temporal Evolution of the Social Sharing of Emotion***

What is the fate of emotional sharing? When do people stop talking about the same emotional experience? Under what conditions do they keep talking about a given episode? These questions remain largely open to investigation. Hereafter, I tentatively propose a model of the temporal evolution of social sharing (see Fig. 2) and I then examine the relevant empirical findings when available.

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Insert Fig. 2 about here

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Immediately after an emotional episode, the experience recurs frequently in a person’s working memory, increasing his or her thoughts of this experience, and the need to share it. With each of these emotional memories, the phenomenology of the past episode largely re-accesses the subject’s consciousness. As time passes, emotional memories of the past episode



become less frequent and its impact on current adaptation becomes progressively negligible. The slope of this extinction is a function of the initial intensity of the emotional experience with more intense emotions generating slower extinction slopes. Extinction is attributable to, at least in part, the fact that new experiences mobilize the subject's attention so that less and less resources are available for older memories. At the final stage of evolution, the memory of an emotional episode becomes "dormant". Dormant memories have no further impact on current adaptation. Yet, "dormant" implies that the memory of an emotional experience might never totally fade away. Recall will occur if the appropriate cues are met in the present context. When such cues are encountered, the forgotten episode re-emerges and impacts anew upon current adaptation. Appropriate contextual cues can powerfully reactivate even very ancient emotional experiences. Emotional memories can also fail to reach a dormant stage. In this case, they can keep mobilizing current attentional resources to the detriment of novel situations. People are generally well aware of the "unrecovered" status of such memories. They overtly express a feeling "to still carry on" a past episode, or "not to be in peace" with it (Tait & Silver, 1989). Emotional memories which fail to reach a dormant stage still elicit a need to socially share them. Therefore, a perpetual need to share a past episode indicates that this episode failed to reach a dormant stage and remains emotionally influential.

In a later section, I will examine the conditions for emotional recovery and the social sharing of emotion's contribution to emotional recovery. I now examine the evidence available with regard to the various hypotheses just mentioned: emotional memories and their extinction, dormant memory and reactivation, nonextinction and unrecovered memories, and unrecovered episodes and perpetual sharing.

***Emotional memories and their extinction.*** Several follow-up studies support the hypothesis that as time passes, emotional memories become less frequent (Rimé et al., 1998). To illustrate, one week after an important exam, 100% of concerned students still talked about

it; two weeks later 94% of them still did so; three weeks later, however, the rate fell to 50%. Comparatively, three months after a loss, the proportion of bereaved persons who still shared their experience was close to 80% (Zech, 1994). As there is little doubt that the loss of a close person is a more severe emotional experience than an academic exam, such data are consistent with the prediction that more intense emotions generate slower extinction slopes. In function of the event intensity, extinction can be expressed in hours, days, weeks, months or even years. Tait & Silver (1989) asked participants to report on the current impact of the “worse event of their life.” Although the events collected under this category took place on average more than 22 years before, they still elicited emotional memories in about half of the sample.

***Dormant memory and reactivation.*** No data are available to specifically test the prediction that reactivating a dormant memory temporarily reinstates the need to share it. In his masterpiece, *In search of lost time*, French author Marcel Proust (1913) gave a famous description of the flood of sensations, feelings, and other memories of his childhood which were revived in him by the mere ingestion of a typical French cookie called a “Madeleine.” His beautiful literary depiction of the experience launched by this recalling cue illustrated how fast and how far forgotten emotionally-loaded memories are reactivated when the appropriate conditions are met. In addition, the fact that Proust wrote this piece with exacting detail points to the notion that reactivated emotional memories reinstate the need to share them.

***Nonextinction and unrecovered memories.*** The current impact of unrecovered emotional memories was investigated in a study in which half of the participants were asked to retrieve from memory a past experience “that still currently affected them” (a recovered episode), whereas the other half were asked to select a memory “that did not affect them any more” (an unrecovered episode) (Rimé, Hayward, & Pennebaker, 1996). After recall, all of the participants answered a questionnaire examining the initial and present impact the recalled

experience produced. Data showed that at the time they occurred, episodes in the two conditions were fully comparable. They did not differ in emotional impact, their social sharing had been initiated equally quickly, and sharing had been repeated with comparable frequency. In contrast, the two types of episodes differed in every regard in their present impact. Compared to recovered episodes, unrecovered episodes elicited much more intense emotions at recall. They also aroused a greater need to share, and they were shared more often. Thus, participants aptly distinguished between recovered and unrecovered emotional experiences in their autobiographical memory. The data also demonstrated that when a past emotional memory still affects someone, the person keeps manifesting the need to share it. This is quite consistent with the general assumption that emotion elicits sharing.

*Unrecovered episode and perpetual sharing.* That an emotional memory which fails to reach a dormant stage still elicits social sharing was confirmed in a review of eight different studies (Rimé et al., 1998). In each study, participants rated the emotional intensity they felt when remembering a past emotional episode (“residual emotional intensity”) and the extent to which they (a) still felt the need to talk about it (“residual need to share”), and (b) still actually talked about it (“actual residual sharing”). The time elapsed between the target emotional event and these ratings ranged from a week to several years, according to the study. For each data set, correlations were computed between residual emotional intensity on the one hand and each of two indices of residual sharing on the other hand. All sixteen coefficients were positive and significant—they ranged from  $r = .20$  to  $r = .64$ . Thus, a quite consistent link was observed between residual emotional intensity and residual sharing.

A longitudinal observation conducted in the context of a study on life stress experienced by women during their pregnancy confirmed that unextinguished emotional experiences elicit an ongoing need to share these experiences (Curci et al., 2007). A sample of 346 women in their 10th to 17th week of pregnancy was interviewed about emotions they

experienced during, or shortly before, pregnancy. Half of them mentioned an important life event in this period. During the second phase (22nd–30th week of pregnancy), and again at the third phase of the study (4–5 days after the delivery), these women completed a questionnaire on the current impact of the event they had reported at the first interview.

Results confirmed that a poorer recovery manifested several weeks or several months after an episode was associated with a higher residual sharing during the same period. In addition, structural analyses demonstrated that the extent of residual sharing at a given time strongly predicted a poorer recovery at the next measurement time.

These results support the view that as long as an emotional memory maintains its impact, it also elicits a need to share it, as well as actual sharing. But does this mean that people who fail to recover from an emotion keep talking about it without limit? It was found that, as was the case for initial emotional intensity and initial sharing, residual sharing increased at lower levels of residual emotionality whereas a ceiling effect occurred at higher levels (Rimé et al., 1998). In addition, correlations between residual emotional intensity and actual sharing were generally lower than those between residual intensity and the need for sharing. This suggests that people who fail to recover from an emotion feel the need to share it, but that their actual sharing is somehow restricted. It is likely that these people's intimates experienced satiation and developed attitudes of social constraint. In other words, as long as a memory elicits emotion, people feel the need to talk about it and they actually do so to some extent. But their propensity to share endlessly is quite probably moderated by discouraging responses from habitual targets.

**Conclusion.** The fate of the social sharing of an emotion is to progressively decline and to finally become a dormant memory. The best known predictor of the slope of this evolution is the initial intensity of the shared emotion. Some emotional experiences are exceptional and continue to demand attention to the detriment of current adaptation. In this

case, the emotional experience continues to stimulate a need to share. However, social constraints exerted by targets usually restrict people from sharing endlessly.

### **Interpersonal and Collective Consequences of Emotion Sharing**

Although social constraints by recipients of social sharing of emotion have already been mentioned twice in this article, they are by no means frequent responses to social sharing situations. In this section, I will focus on the effects that sharing situations have on targets and on the sharing person's social environment. It will be shown that if individuals who experienced an emotion are motivated to share this experience with others, the latter generally lend themselves quite willingly to this type of social interaction. In addition, far from neglecting thereafter what they were told, the social sharing target more often propagate the shared content later with their own usual sharing targets. I first develop theoretical views on targets' responses to a social sharing round. Next, I examine predictions regarding the propagation of the social sharing of emotion. Finally, I examine the empirical evidence related to these two topics.

#### ***Interpersonal Dynamic of the Social Sharing of Emotion***

When driving by a traffic accident, drivers slow down to watch. Pedestrians change their route to look at a building in flames. People are attracted to emotional stories in the media, as well as in movies, novels, plays, drama, opera, songs, images, and so forth. A fascination for emotional material literally permeates everyday life (Rimé et al., 2005). I thus predict that a similar fascination is elicited among listeners of the social sharing of emotion. Once listeners expose themselves to the expressed emotions of a narrator, predictions of the Perception-Action model of empathy should hold (Preston & de Waal, 2002). This model states that "attended perception of the object's state automatically activates the subject's

representations of the state, situation, and object, and that activation of these representations automatically primes or generates the associated autonomic and somatic responses, unless inhibited” (Preston & de Waal, 2002, p. 4). In conjunction with this model, data indeed show that being exposed to an emotional narrative is in itself an emotion-eliciting situation (Archer & Berg, 1978; Lazarus, Opton, Monikos, & Rankin, 1965; Shortt & Pennebaker, 1992; Strack & Coyne, 1983). Listeners in a social sharing situation are thus expected to experience emotional responses in their turn. Moreover, the intensity of these responses should vary as a direct function of the intensity of the emotional experience to which they are exposed. Furthermore, empathy and a feeling of emotional communion should result from the aroused emotional feelings. Once empathy is elicited, prosocial behavior should follow. More specifically, I view a social sharing situation as an adult-life analogue of attachment behaviors as they are described in the caregiver-child relationship. Caregivers respond to infants’ distress by comforting them and by demonstrating love, care, availability, proximity, or contact (e. g. Bowlby, 1969; Harlow, 1959). I thus expect emotion sharing situations to stimulate attachment behaviors among targets.

This reasoning suggests that in the social sharing of emotions, a characteristic interpersonal dynamic takes place. A similar dynamic has already been documented in the study of self-disclosure (e.g., Reis & Patrick, 1996). This dynamic proceeds as follows (Fig. 3). Person A experiences an emotion and shares it with B. The latter manifests a marked interest for the shared content and this stimulates Person A to express the emotion more and more. Consequently, emotional arousal is activated in Person B. A reciprocal stimulation of emotion thus develops among the interactants and leads to enhanced empathy in Person B. The latter then experiences a willingness to help and support Person A. The higher the emotional intensity of the shared episode, the more Person B gives up using verbal expression and switches to a nonverbal communication mode, with body contact or touching. As a result,

B's affection for A increases. Similarly A, who is the focus of B's attention, interest, empathy, and support, experiences enhanced affection for the latter. This opens upon the prediction that sharing emotion is effective in bringing a narrator and listener closer to one another. In sum, social sharing interactions are expected to strengthen social bonds, link the interactants, and end in enhanced social integration. As sharing targets are predominantly intimates, the sharing process thus appears to be an efficient tool for refreshing and consolidating intimacy. In daily life, individuals are busy with their own occupations, and their social ties loosen. Every emotional experience would thus create a new opportunity to reinstate intimacy between individuals and their targets.

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 Insert Fig. 3 about here  
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To sum up, five specific predictions are formulated with regard to the interpersonal consequences of sharing an emotion. If they lend themselves to the interaction, exposed targets are expected to manifest (1) interest, (2) emotional contagion, (3) empathy and sympathy, (4) attachment behaviors, and (5) enhanced affection for the narrator.

### ***The Social Sharing of Emotion Propagates***

As previously discussed, being exposed to an emotional narrative is in itself an emotion-eliciting situation (Archer & Berg, 1978; Lazarus et al., 1965; Shortt & Pennebaker, 1992; Strack & Coyne, 1983). Consequently, the following hypothesis should be formulated for the social sharing of emotion. If experiencing an emotion elicits the social sharing of this emotion, then the listener should in turn share the emotion with a third person. In other words, a "secondary social sharing" should follow any "primary" sharing interaction. Furthermore, secondary social sharing is also expected to elicit an emotional response in listeners and,

therefore, a tertiary social sharing is expected to occur. This means that an emotional event activates the dissemination of related emotional information across social networks. In sum, a social sharing propagation chain is created. As I suggest in Figure 4, when an intense emotional event affects someone, a considerable number of people in this person's community are expected to hear about it through the sharing chain within the next few hours.

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Insert Fig. 4 about here  
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Individuals are thus likely to keep track of the emotional experiences affecting their peers. Such a process would be particularly efficient for the construction of collective knowledge about emotional events, emotional responses, and their consequences. A continual updating of this collective knowledge would occur as a function of every new private emotional experience. Since emotions occur when events are unexpected or unpredicted and since emotional situations require a quick and appropriate response, the spread of emotion sharing offers people a particularly effective prevention tool for future situations. The social consequences of emotions will be considerably enhanced when emotions result from media-displayed collective events, such as collective loss, victory, defeat, success, failure, catastrophe, accident, or common threat (Rimé, 2007a). In the case of a private emotion, sharing propagates essentially in an exocentric direction. When collective emotions are experienced, there are as many narrators as there are people in the audience and the propagation should diffuse in many directions. With a private emotion, propagation is expected to decrease with the social distance from the initial source. In collective emotion, each sharing round would reactivate felt emotions in as many initial sources, thus reloading the propagation flow. Consequently, collective emotional events are expected to spark a social process resembling nuclear chain reactions.



### *Empirical Evidence*

***Social-integrative functions of social sharing.*** Christophe & Rimé (1997) compared the emotional effects that shared episodes of low, moderate, or high intensity had on listeners. Supporting the prediction that people are attracted to emotional stories, listeners in all three conditions manifested a very high level of interest for the shared episode. Most of them rated the emotion of interest at maximal value on the rating scale. Next, results confirmed the prediction that listening to another person's emotional story is emotion-eliciting. Moderate or high intensity episodes were rated as more influential than low intensity ones, and more intense episodes elicited stronger negative emotions (fear, sadness, or disgust). Thus, listeners manifested both positive (interest) and negative affects—this might explain why sharing takes place even when markedly unpleasant emotions are involved. Further results revealed that listeners' responses to the sharing person also varied with the intensity of the shared episode (Christophe & Rimé, 1997). For low intensity episodes, listeners' responses consisted mostly of verbal manifestations and verbal comments aimed at diminishing the seriousness of the event. These types of responses decreased linearly with increasing intensity of the shared episode. Conversely, higher intensity episodes generated more displays of nonverbal behaviors such as touching, body contact, taking into the arms, or kissing, by the recipients. In sum, increasing levels of emotional intensity prompt sharing interactions to become decreasingly verbal and increasingly nonverbal. This is in line with the prediction that social sharing situation would elicit attachment responses on the part of exposed individuals.

Meta-analytic data confirm that people who engage in intimate disclosure tend to be more well-liked than people who disclose at lower levels, and that additionally, people like others as a result of having disclosed to them (Collins & Miller, 1994). Laurenceau, Feldman-Barrett, and Pietromonaco (1998) stressed that emotion is a crucial ingredient in this regard

when they observed that: “*self-disclosure of emotion emerged as a more important predictor of intimacy than did self-disclosure of facts and information*” (p. 1238). Espitalier, Tcherkassof and Delmas (2002) demonstrated that emotion sharing can enhance participants’ social integration. In this study, participants viewed a movie and were then assigned to a discussion group of four people. The groups were randomly assigned to discuss either emotional or technical aspects of the movie. Participants in control groups had no discussion. The strength of the social ties between group participants was then assessed. Compared to the other two groups, the average strength of these ties was significantly higher in discussion groups where emotions were shared. Consistent with these findings, Peters & Kashima (2007) observed that emotion sharing creates a coalition between the narrator and the audience. When emotion sharing occurred, participants were more bonded with narrators. These authors concluded from four studies that emotion sharing had powerful consequences for social structures and group action.

***The spread of emotion sharing.*** Studies tested the prediction that a secondary social sharing would generally follow primary sharing situations (Christophe & Rimé, 1997). In one study, participants were asked to recall a recent listening situation in which they heard an episode resembling those in a list of twenty. By random assignment, they received either a list of low intensity episodes (i.e., lower end of a classic life-events scale), or of moderate intensity episodes (i.e., higher end of the same scale), or of high intensity episodes (i.e., a list of potential elicitors of post traumatic stress). The participants then rated their secondary social sharing of the recalled episode. The study revealed that secondary social sharing was mentioned by most respondents (overall, in 78% of the cases), with no significant differences across conditions. However, as was evidenced for primary social sharing (Rimé et al., 1998), the frequency of secondary sharing was related to the intensity of the episode. More intense

episodes indeed elicited more repetition of secondary sharing, and had been addressed to a larger number of partners.

These observations were replicated and expanded upon by Curci and Bellelli (2004). In one of their studies, volunteer students completed a daily diary for 15 days. Every night, they reported an episode that someone had shared with them during the day. The data showed that on average participants encountered such a situation every day and a half (or in 10 out of the 15 days). Thus, 875 episodes were collected (302 positive and 573 negative). *On the day they were heard*, 54% of these episodes were secondarily shared, with no difference as a function of valence—a result which virtually matches those collected for primary sharing (i.e., 60% on average, see above). At the end of the diary procedure, participants rated their *total* secondary sharing for each of the events they had reported. The data revealed that 55% of the events that were not shared on the day they were heard were shared on a later day. In this manner, 75% of all the episodes collected in this study were shared, closely replicating previous findings (Christophe & Rimé, 1997) relying on autobiographic recall.

Because targets of secondary sharing also experience emotion while listening, a *tertiary sharing* should follow. Christophe (1997) found that for one third of participants, episodes heard in a secondary sharing were indeed shared again with several new listeners, whereas for another third of the participants, it was shared with one new listener. In total, two-thirds of secondary listeners manifested some tertiary sharing. This confirmed that an emotional event sparks the spread of emotional information across social networks. A field study conducted by Harber & Cohen (2005) supported the propagation chain described in Fig. 2. In this study, 33 college students visited a hospital morgue within the framework of a class. Students' intensity of emotional reactions to this visit was found predictive of the number of people they told (primary sharing), of the number of people their friends told (secondary sharing), and of the number of people their friends' friends told (tertiary sharing).

The study showed that within 10 days, nearly 900 people had heard about this event through these cascading levels of social sharing. Consistent with these observations, research on rumors or urban legends demonstrate that the circulation of stories relies upon emotional rather than informational selection (Heath, Bell, & Sternberg, 2001). When informational aspects of truth and usefulness were controlled, people were more willing to pass along stories that elicited stronger emotion. It was also found that more emotional legends were distributed more widely.

### ***Conclusions***

Data confirm that the social sharing of emotion opens up important social consequences. When receivers lend themselves to the sharing process, a state of emotional communion is likely to follow. Additionally, in line with my speculation that emotion sharing is the adult equivalent of attachment manifestations, sharing situations indeed favor the occurrence of attachment behavior on the part of sharing targets. Further, a good deal of data reveal that, consistent with hypotheses about secondary and tertiary social sharing, listeners indeed become actors in their turn in the transmission of emotional episodes, and that a process of propagation of emotional information develops in this manner in the surrounding social network. Through this process, everyone in a group learns what happened to one of its members. The process thus offers a powerful social tool at the service of continual updating of shared knowledge, theories, and representations. At the same time, each sharing interaction in a propagation chain brings interactants closer to one another. In sum, beside the outcome that this person-to-person sharing process has for collective knowledge, it also consolidates the social integration of the various participants. It can thus be concluded that, unknown to most, individual emotional experiences have important potential consequences for both social knowledge and group integration.

### **Social Sharing of Emotion and Emotion Regulation**

Our final topic concerns the contribution of the social sharing of emotion to the regulation of the shared emotional experience. In this context, I will focus entirely upon negative episodes. I will begin by considering two facts. First, people are quite eager to share negative emotions. Second, it is commonly assumed that talking about a negative emotion is a relief.

The first fact is well illustrated in a study in which participants were asked to describe a past emotional experience (of joy, anger, fear, or sadness, according to the condition) in detail, and then answered a questionnaire examining what they had experienced while sharing (Rimé et al., 1991b). Nearly all of the participants reported mental images of the emotional event as well as related feelings and bodily sensations. Thus, they re-experienced the shared episode. Next, they were asked to what extent the sharing was pleasant or painful to them. Not surprisingly, sharing an experience of joy was rated as more pleasant than sharing a negative emotion. Yet, sharing fear, sadness, or anger was rated only by a minority as painful or very painful. Notwithstanding the reactivation of a negative experience, social sharing did not appear to be as aversive as expected. A final question asked whether participants would be ready to share another past emotional event of the same kind “here and now.” Overall, 93.7% of the participants gave a positive answer, and their answers did not differ significantly whether the emotion shared previously was positively (joy) or negatively valenced (fear, sadness, or anger). These observations reveal a paradox. On the one hand, social sharing reactivates the components of the emotion which, in the case of a negative emotion, should be experienced as aversive. On the other hand, sharing an emotion, whether positive or negative, is a situation to which people are quite willingly inclined. If people are so willing to engage in a social sharing process despite the reactivation of negative feelings, they should find notable benefits in these situations.

As regards the second fact mentioned above, common sense often suggests to “talk out” a negative emotion, or “to get it off your chest.” It is thus assumed that talking would bring relief. Some 80% of a large survey sample in a Western country endorsed the view that talking out emotions is helpful and this was then replicated in Hong-Kong (Zech, 2000). Most psychologists share a similar view since the earliest times of psychotherapy. Freud initially considered repressed emotions as the main cause of neurosis and he viewed emotional expression as the appropriate cure (Breuer & Freud, 1885/1955). Though he later changed his view, many psychologists still emphasize the therapeutic effects of emotional expression (see Scheff, 1979 for a review) and believe that *merely talking* about an emotional experience dissolves its emotional impact. If data could confirm this “expression-discharge” hypothesis, it would shed light on the reasons why people so unanimously recommend talking out emotions.

### ***The Double Impact of a Past Negative Emotional Experience***

In this section, I examine what the social sharing of emotion brings and what it does not bring to emotional recovery. First, I re-examine my distinction between the *obvious* and the *subtle* consequences of a negative emotional experience, and I then propose several hypotheses on the type of action needed to buffer each of these consequences respectively. Figure 5 summarizes my major points in this regard. Finally, I review the relevant empirical evidence.

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Insert Fig. 5 about here

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***Obvious impact of a past negative emotion.*** I argue that a negative emotional experience maintains an impact upon current adaptation when cognitions involved in the

corresponding memory network sustain the signaling function of emotion. Such cognitions cause the network to re-access the working memory and to rouse mental rumination, intrusive thoughts and images, a need to talk, and actual sharing. As previously noted, in such cases individuals express the feeling not to be at peace with the past episode. Cognitions of three kinds can provoke such emotional memories (Rimé, 2005; 2007b): (1) representation of goals which were blocked by the emotion-eliciting situation (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Dembo, 1931; Klinger, 1975; Mandler, 1984; Martin & Tesser, 1989); (2) expectations, schemas, models, or self- and worldviews which were disconfirmed by the situation (Epstein, 1990, 1991; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Horowitz, 1976, 1979; Piaget, 1946; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Brown, 1988); and (3) persistent initial appraisal of the encoded emotional situation—if the person's appraisal of the recalled situation duplicates the initial appraisal of this situation, the same emotion is triggered every time the memory is accessed. To eliminate the current impact of a past episode, and thus to achieve emotional recovery, emotion regulation should thus turn off each of these various memory-sustaining cognitions. This requires completion of all the relevant cognitive tasks: abandonment of one's frustrated goals, reorganization of one's hierarchy of motives, accommodation of one's models and schemas, re-creation of meaning, and assimilation of the event through reframing or reappraisal. A thorough completion of these cognitive tasks would lead to emotional recovery.

*Subtle effects of a past negative emotional experience.* As I stressed earlier, negative emotional episodes have collateral effects involving a momentary destabilization of the person. I argued that the source of such a distressing condition is multifaceted. It involves all at once goal frustration, disconfirmation of expectations, disconfirmation of models and worldviews, loss of symbolic buffers, loss of meaning, and experience of a defeated self. The condition manifests itself in the form of anxiety, insecurity, helplessness, estrangement, alienation, loss of self-esteem, loss of self-confidence, and a feeling of loneliness. How could

this distressing condition be buffered? I argue that as a legacy from early attachment schemes, distress arouses potent *socio-affective* needs in adults and thus opens up a quest for appeasement, comfort, love, care, availability, proximity, or contact (e.g., Bowlby, 1969; Harlow, 1959); for material help and assistance (e.g. Stroebe & Stroebe, 1996; Thoits, 1984); for support, reassurance, and esteem (e.g. Epstein, 1973); and for social recognition and validation (e.g. Wortman & Lehman, 1985). In sum, distressed individuals experience socio-affective needs. In my view, this quest plays an important role in individuals' motivation to socially share their emotional experiences profusely and to do it quite willingly.

### ***Social Sharing Modes and their Effects***

To what extent does the social sharing of emotion buffer both the *obvious* and the *subtle* impact of a past negative emotion? I propose that two types of sharing modes need to be considered. On the one hand, a cognitive mode takes place when social sharing targets stimulate a narrator's cognitive work, prompting them to abandon their frustrated goals, reorganize their hierarchy of motives, accommodate their models and schemas, re-create meaning, and reframe or re-appraise the episode. On the other hand, the socio-affective mode contributes to the fulfillment of the socio-affective needs of the narrator by providing him or her with responses that offer help, support, comfort, consolation, legitimization, attention, bonding, and empathy. Social sharing rounds developed along a cognitive route can contribute to the extinction of a past negative experience, and thus achieve emotional recovery. Social sharing rounds which develop along the socio-affective route would not contribute to the extinction of a past negative experience. However, they are well-suited to alleviating narrators' insecurity, anxiety, helplessness, loneliness, and so forth. When this happens, narrators experience deep feelings of relief and they describe the situation as highly beneficial to them. However, when the social sharing process develops along the socio-



affective route in the absence of any cognitive contribution, its relieving effects are expected only to be temporary. Because socio-affective responses do not extinguish the source of the subtle effects of a past negative episode, the impact of this episode would reemerge shortly after the sharing round, opening upon new memories of the episode and a renewed need to share it. I argue that in routine conditions, social sharing interactions develop predominantly along the socio-affective route and that this constitutes a major reason why sharing is modally a repetitive manifestation. At least five arguments support such a view.

First, as it develops routinely, the social sharing of emotion essentially favors socio-affective processes. Both narrators' demands and targets' responses concur with this conclusion. Narrators' most immediate demands arise from the activation of their attachment system. They primarily address their intimates in view of a reduction of their distress. They thus stimulate attachment responses from their addressees. This favors the interpersonal dynamic which was described and documented in the previous section and which prototypically fits the socio-affective mode.

A second argument in favor of a preponderant socio-affective mode lies in the fact that distressing situations hardly elicit complex responses from nonvictims. Simplistic approaches and simplistic interventions usually prevail because nonvictims dramatically underestimate a victim' situation (e.g. Coates, Wortman, & Abbey, 1979; Goffman, 1963; Wortman & Lehman, 1985). Exposure to negative circumstances indeed generates anxiety among bystanders. For the sake of their own protection, their predominant concern is generally a quick resolution of the crisis. Simple solutions, such as eliminating the cause or extricating the victim from the problematic situation, dominate (Burlison, 1985; O'Keefe & Delia, 1987). Comforting interventions often consist of low level imperatives focused on action and recommendations such as "get it off your chest...!" are typical of this kind. Most laypersons

are unable to take into account the complex consequences negative emotional experiences entail.

A third argument favoring the preponderance of the socio-affective mode in emotional sharing is that most of the sharing process develops in the period immediately following the episode. In this period, individuals are generally not ready for the changes implied by the cognitive work. Emotion-inducing situations, such as goal-blocking, consistently elicited an initially enhanced concentration on the unattained goal, with invigoration and repetitive efforts (e.g., Dembo, 1931; Klinger, 1975; Martin & Tesser, 1989). In other words, soon after an emotion, individuals generally refuse to abandon their frustrated goals, they do not consider modifying their hierarchy of motives, they stick to their existing schemas, they do not want to change their representations, they stand by their initial appraisal of the emotional situation, they do not feel ready to reframe it, nor to change their perspective.

A fourth argument in the same vein comes from the demonstration that when more intense emotional experiences are socially shared, listeners' responses become less and less verbal and increasingly nonverbal (Christophe & Rimé, 1997). Obviously, nonverbal manifestations cannot be expected to contribute to the cognitive mode. Thus again, at least in the case of intense emotions, social sharing situations fail to favor this mode.

Fifth, an investigation of the alleged motives for engaging in sharing reveal that motives of the socio-affective kind prevailed. Four sets of data are available in this regard. (Delfosse, Nils, Lasserre & Rimé, 2004; Finkenauer & Rimé, 1996; Nils, Delfosse and Rimé, 2005; Wetzler, Zeelenberg, and Pieters, 2005). Three of these data sets came from respondents who were prompted to recall recent emotional experiences and then asked to list the reasons why they had engaged in social sharing. The fourth data set (Wetzler et al., 2005) was theory-based and relied upon the literature on social sharing, on word-of-mouth communication, and on social interaction. Categorizing the various motives provided 9, 8, 9 and 7 categories,

respectively, with large overlaps between them. A synthesis of these categories is displayed in Table 1 under twelve classes of motives. Most of the motives in the list manifest considerable demands addressed to social sharing targets. Partners are indeed expected to provide help and support, comfort and consolation, legitimization, clarification and meaning, and advice and solutions. This long list of specific social solicitations is extended further with less specific and more personally involving demands, such as attention, bonding, and empathy. Thus, the alleged motives for sharing emotions especially meet socio-affective needs. They also meet some cognitive regulation needs, such as finding clarification and meaning. Yet, major cognitive needs such as abandonment of goals, reorganization of motives, reconstruction of schemas, reframing and reappraisal of the event are simply absent from social demands for regulation. Participants simply might not be aware of such motives. In any case, the study of motives for sharing confirm the preponderance of socio-affective demands in the sharing process.

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 Insert Table 1

about here  
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Thus, all five elements concur to suggest that spontaneous sharing does generally not fuel the cognitive route. It should be stressed that nothing precludes listeners from providing socio-cognitive responses, and therefore the possibility exists for sharing situations to contribute to emotional recovery. Yet, observing spontaneous social sharing situations suggests that this is far from being common. Ample opportunity is then open for professional intervention focused on the cognitive processing of emotional episodes.

This two-mode model leads to an important prediction regarding what can and cannot be expected, as a result of spontaneous sharing situations. I predict that spontaneous sharing

situations bring narrators an important sense of relief, but no effect upon their emotional recovery. This prediction stands in sharp contrast to the expression-discharge, or cathartic hypothesis, which predicts that *merely talking* about an emotional experience can dissolve its emotional impact. I believe that what individuals most often experience in sharing situations are the temporary benefits of the completion of their socio-affective needs. Because people are indiscriminate in this regard, they equate emotional relief with emotional recovery, and the benefits they perceive from talking out emotion in an interpersonal context thus reinforces the false belief that sharing entails "cathartic" effects .

### ***Does the Mere Sharing of Emotions Bring Emotional Recovery? Empirical Evidence***

In this section, I examine and discuss the various empirical facts relevant to assessing the hypothesis that sharing emotions brings emotional recovery. I also examine direct tests of the respective effects of both the cognitive and socio-affective sharing modes previously defined.

***Written disclosure.*** In the last two decades, inspired by James Pennebaker's studies, scientific interest emerged regarding the effects of written disclosure of emotion on well-being. In these studies (e.g., Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988), participants wrote about past stressful or traumatic events in their lives for short sessions (15 to 30 minutes) held daily on several consecutive days. In control groups, participants wrote about trivial topics. The basic finding of these studies was that when compared to the control group, participants who wrote about trauma showed both less frequent illness-related visits to a health center and fewer self-reported illness symptoms at follow-up (Pennebaker and Beall, 1986). Further studies extended these findings to other health outcomes, including improved immune function (Esterling, Antoni, Fletcher, Margulies, & Schneiderman, 1994). A meta-analytic review

involving 146 randomized writing studies confirmed written disclosure to be beneficial for one's psychological health, physical health, and overall functioning (Frattaroli, 2006).

These findings are generally understood as supporting the view that “putting emotion into words” is conducive to emotional recovery. It is indeed largely accepted that the beneficial effects obtained from writing result from mediation of the emotional turmoil associated with memories of distressing episodes. Whereas writing studies clearly document the independent (writing) and dependent (health and well-being) variables, they do not examine whether the hypothetical mediator can explain the relations established between these variables. In particular, these studies do not assess whether putting a *specific* emotional episode into words brings about significant relief of this *specific* episode's memory. This is due in large part to the standard instructions inviting participants to “write about as *many* traumatic experiences of their past” as they wished. Admittedly, it can hardly be assessed whether the memory of *many* traumatic experiences would have been alleviated as a result of the procedure. However, the possibility of testing the effects of writing upon emotional recovery exists. It would suffice to limit the writing instructions to a single, well specified, emotional episode. This task is still open to future investigation.

***Shared vs. secret emotional events.*** Several studies compared shared and secret emotions. Participants were asked if they could recall an important emotional life event which they had kept secret. Consistent with the previous findings by Pennebaker (1989), participants who reported the memory of a non-shared emotion also reported a higher number of illnesses than those who did not have such a memory (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998b). In addition, those who had not shared at least one emotion scored lower on various markers of life satisfaction. However, when shared and secret emotional episodes were re-accessed and compared for the intensity of their emotional impact, no significant difference was observed (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998a). Thus, nonshared memories were no more no less emotionally arousing when

re-accessed than shared ones. These findings thus fail to support what the expression-discharge view would predict.

***Extent of social sharing and emotional recovery.*** The expression-discharge hypothesis has been further tested in studies wherein participants were observed after a specific emotional event. The research designs generally involved the assessment of (1) the initial intensity of emotions elicited by the episode, (2) the extent of sharing that developed after, and (3) the intensity of emotions elicited when the memory of the episode was later activated. For each participant, the degree of emotional recovery was established by the difference between (1) and (3), and it was evaluated by the extent to which this variable correlated positively with social sharing. Results of these studies—which remained unpublished due to their negative results—failed to yield such correlations. To illustrate, (Rimé et al., 1994), participants in a diary study described their most intense emotional experience of the previous day every evening for three weeks. They then answered questions about the experience, including intensity of impact and extent of sharing. Two to three weeks later, participants were reintroduced to six emotional events taken from these diary reports (three intense, three weak), and they rated each of the events for extent of current sharing, extent of current rumination, and intensity of current emotional impact. A recovery index was calculated by subtracting the follow-up impact from the initial impact. Both for initially weak events and for initially intense ones, this recovery index was negatively correlated with follow-up sharing. This confirmed again that people who have recovered less from an episode keep sharing it. But, the recovery index was in no case significantly related to initial sharing so that the expression-discharge view again failed to be supported.

***Experimental induction of social sharing.*** Pennebaker and Beall (1986) observed that writing about factual aspects of an emotional episode did not affect their health variables, whereas writing about emotional aspects did. Experiments involving such variations in

sharing were thus conducted with emotional recovery as a dependent variable (Zech, 2000; Zech & Rimé, 2005). In three studies, psychology students interviewed a relative about a recent negative emotional event. In a fourth, participants extensively shared the most upsetting event of their life with an experimenter. In each of the four studies, participants were instructed to emphasize either the factual aspects of the episode, or their related feelings. In control groups, the participants talked about a nonemotional topic. The current emotional impact that the shared event had when re-accessed was assessed through various indices, for example, emotional intensity of the memory, intensity of bodily sensations, and action tendencies. The assessments were done before the sharing interview, immediately after, and again a couple of days later. In one of the studies, additional assessments were conducted two months later. In contrast to what the expression-discharge model predicts, none of the studies yielded effect of sharing type on these indices of emotional impact. However, compared to those in the factual sharing and in the control conditions, participants in the felt emotions condition consistently rated the sharing session as more emotionally alleviating, more cognitively helpful, and more interpersonally beneficial. Thus, the impact of the emotional memory was not altered in the sharing situation which did not involve the cognitive mode. Yet, participants who had shared their emotions clearly reported the benefits which were predicted for sharing situations of the socio-affective kind.

***Psychological debriefings.*** Clinical research conducted on the effects of psychological debriefing techniques provided data relevant to the expression-discharge hypothesis. Psychological debriefing is a group intervention technique developed for implementation immediately after a traumatic event (see Dyregrov, 1997; Mitchell & Everly, 1995, for overviews). Participants in small groups each describe what happened from their perspective. They are asked to express their prominent thoughts about the event and to communicate the worse aspects of their experience. The purpose of this technique is to prevent the development

of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) which involve manifestations of intrusion and of avoidance of memories of the traumatic episode. It is thus well suited to testing the expression-discharge view. Recently, several meta-analytic reviews assessed the findings of controlled studies conducted in this perspective (Arendt & Elklit, 2001; Rose & Bisson, 1998; Van Emmerik, Kamphuis, Hulsbosch, & Emmelkamp, 2002). These reviews consistently concluded that debriefings have no efficacy in reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorders or other trauma-related symptoms. Adverse effects were even found. However, in spite of these inconclusive results regarding emotional recovery, psychological debriefing procedures have generally demonstrated clear perceived benefits among participants. Quite generally, people who have been exposed to a traumatic situation report that taking part in a psychological debriefing was useful and beneficial to them. Thus, with the absence of a recovery effect and a wealth of expressed benefits, the findings from studies of psychological debriefings closely parallel those from social sharing studies.

*The social sharing of laboratory-induced emotions.* Finally, in three laboratory studies, a movie-clip emotional induction was followed by either a social sharing session about the movie, or by some control condition in which sharing was absent. Their findings regarding recovery effects were hardly consistent. Both Mendolia and Kleck (1993) and Lepore, Ragan and Jones (2000) observed recovery effects when participants were re-exposed to the movie 48 hours later. Compared to the control groups, those who had shared their emotion manifested lower perceived stress levels (Lepore et al., 2000) or reported feeling more positive (Mendolia & Kleck, 1993). In addition, Mendolia and Kleck (1993) recorded physiological recovery effects, but Lepore et al. (2000) did not replicate this finding. In a third investigation, Lepore, Fernandez-Berrocal, Ragan, and Ramos (2004) assigned participants who had viewed an emotional movie to either (1) a challenging partner, (2) a validating partner, (3) a talk alone condition, or (4) a no-talk control condition. Compared to the “no



talk” group, participants in the challenging condition manifested a clearly superior recovery. However, this result was not consistent with the findings from the two previously mentioned studies. In both of those, recovery was favored by emotion talking—a condition which compares with a validating (supportive) condition, and certainly not with a challenging one.

**Conclusion.** No consistent empirical support was found for the common view that putting an emotional experience into words can resolve it. The abundance of null findings in studies of the expression-discharge hypothesis strongly suggest that merely sharing an emotion cannot change the emotional memory. Interestingly, Kennedy-Moore and Watson (1999) reached a similar conclusion in their review of empirical studies on the “venting hypothesis.” This hypothesis claims that the expression of distress, such as crying, or the expression of anger, has direct and immediate effects of relief. At the end of their review, Kennedy-Moore and Watson (1999) wrote: “At this point, it should be clear that the venting hypothesis and its corollaries are myths. Whether or not expression of distress is beneficial depends on what is expressed, to whom, and how” (p. 58).

### ***A Direct Test of the Two Social Sharing Modes***

Several studies directly tested the respective effects of the cognitive mode and the socio-affective mode by varying listeners’ responses in social sharing situations (Nils & Rimé, 2007b). In a random assignment, listeners adopted either a socio-affective response or responses that would prompt cognitive work by the sharing person. Predictions were as follows.

***Predicted effects of socio-affective responses.*** If listeners adopt socio-affective responses, should emotional recovery follow for the initiator? This model predicts a negative answer. Emotional feelings could temporarily increase as a result of reviving the emotional experience. Consequently, mental rumination, intrusive thoughts, and the need for sharing

may be enhanced in the period immediately following a sharing round. Should changes in cognitions and motivations result from this socio-affective sharing? A negative answer is implied by the model. Indeed, the initial appraisal of the event would be left unchanged, frustrated goals would stay at the foreground, gaps in representations and schemas would not be fulfilled, and nothing would have contributed constructively to the search for meaning elicited by the episode. Should the destabilizing impact of the episode be buffered? In this case, the model predicts a positive answer. After the sharing session, the initiator is expected to report feelings of being recognized, validated, supported, the impression of relief, reduction of loneliness, an increase in social integration, as well as a strengthening of shared beliefs. It should be stressed, however, that these effects are at risk of being only temporary. Because emotional recovery failed to be achieved in such an interaction, the emotional impact of the episode can persist and may reactivate the destabilization. This is likely an explanation for observations that demonstrate that despite recurrent sharing, people who failed to recover from a given emotional experience keep manifesting the need to share it.

***Predicted effects of cognitive responses.*** If listeners adopt responses that prompt cognitive work, should emotional recovery follow for the initiator? The model predicts a positive answer and thereby a subsequent reduction in mental rumination, intrusive thoughts, and the need for sharing. Would change in cognitions and motivations be recorded after such social interactions? Yes, indeed, according to the model. There are chances that, due to the prompted cognitive work, the initial appraisal of the event would be modified, that frustrated goals would be abandoned, that gaps in representation and schemas would be fulfilled, and that the search for meaning would be brought to completion. Should the destabilizing impact of the episode be buffered? The model proposes a negative answer. Nothing in these cognitive responses condition would elicit feelings of being recognized, validated, and supported. There

would be no reduction of loneliness, and no enhancement of the feeling of integration. There would be no strengthening of shared beliefs.

*Experimental findings.* In one of the experiments (Nils & Rimé, 2008), volunteer students were individually induced into a negative emotional state using a movie clip. Immediately after the movie, participants shared their movie experience with a friend of theirs who came to the lab at the same time. Friends were used as targets because social sharing studies repeatedly show that sharing very generally addresses friends. While the participant watched the movie, the friend was instructed to maintain a systematic attitude in the sharing session. In one condition, the friend had to maintain an empathetic attitude, which corresponded to a socio-affective response. In a second condition, the friend had to manifest positive reframing, which corresponded to one modality of cognitive responding. In a third, control condition, the friend had to maintain a neutral attitude. Dependent variables were measured immediately after the sharing session, and then 48 hours later after re-exposure to movie. Participants completed scales assessing emotional, cognitive, and social variables with emotional distress, beliefs and world views, and degree of loneliness, respectively.

The results showed that movie-related emotional distress was significantly lower in the cognitive condition than in the two others. This effect was again observed after re-exposure to the movie, thus confirming that a cognitively-oriented sharing brings emotional recovery. In addition, after both sharing and movie re-exposure, beliefs and world views that were challenged by the movie content (i.e., scenes of human cruelty toward animals), were significantly less dampened in the cognitive condition than in the two others, thus confirming that a cognitively-oriented sharing contributes to the reconstruction of assumptions. Finally, after both sharing and movie re-exposure, loneliness scores were much lower in the socio-affective condition than in the two others, thereby confirming the benefits of interpersonal and

social integration brought about by a socio-affectively-oriented sharing. Altogether, these results, and those from other experiments, were quite consistent with the model.

Additional consistency emerged from studies mentioned earlier in which Lepore et al. (2004) exposed students to a dramatic video (real-life gang scene) on two different days. Participants were assigned to either (1) a challenging partner condition, comparable to Nils and Rimé' (2007) cognitive reframing condition, (2) a validating partner condition, which resembled Nils and Rimé' (2007) empathetic or socio-affective condition, (3) a condition in which they talked alone about their reaction, or (4) a no talk control condition. The talk alone and the validating condition did not differ, or only marginally, when compared to the no talk group. Quite consistent with the proposed model, however, participants in the cognitive reframing condition showed the greatest adjustment to stress. These participants reported the lowest level of emotional distress during re-exposure to the video as well as the lowest levels of intrusive thoughts and avoidance reactions.

**Conclusions.** These findings confirm that when social sharing situations stimulate cognitive work, they can attenuate movie-related emotional arousal and rumination. Thus, in compliance with the proposed model, a sharing situation that prompts cognitive responses can produce the recovery effect that former studies, which focused on mere social sharing, systematically failed to observe. The results also show that an empathetic sharing situation provoke no effects, or only weak ones, on emotional arousal and rumination. This confirms that emotional recovery effects are specific to cognitive work and cannot be achieved when the social sharing situation is focused on socio-affective variables. However, in line with the model, participants in the empathetic sharing condition rated their partner as more similar, friendlier, and more empathic than the challenging or cognitive-reframing confederate. In other words, whereas empathetic confederates did not help to decrease movie-related emotional arousal and rumination, they fulfilled participants' socio-affective needs better.

Thus, when listeners adopt socio-affective responses in the social sharing process, the emotional distress elicited by the shared negative experience can be relieved, at least for some time. The model predicts that in the absence of recovery effects, the benefits resulting from a sharing situation of the socio-affective type would be only temporary.

In this study, the target emotion was the result of a laboratory induction. Because the stress level from such an induction was probably minimal, participants could easily lend themselves to cognitive work immediately afterward. This is unlikely to happen after a real-life intense emotional experience. True cognitive work that involves change and creativity cannot be expected on the part of a person experiencing intense emotional distress. This leads to predict that an optimal timing exists for the respective onset of each of the socio-affective and the cognitive sharing modes. In the period immediately following an emotional episode, socio-affective sharing aimed at buffering the emotional distress should take precedence. As time goes by, and as the emotional distress wanes, social sharing focused on cognitive work should progressively take place. Future studies should examine the respective effects of these two social sharing modes in the context of real-life emotional episodes of various levels of intensity, and these studies should take into account the timing hypothesis.

### **General Conclusions**

I conclude this article by taking stock of the theoretical considerations and empirical findings which were reviewed. To this purpose, two specific questions will be addressed. First, what are the various functions that the social sharing of emotion can serve? Second, what does emotion research gain from the study of the social sharing of emotion?

#### ***Functions Served by Sharing Emotion***

Hereafter, I will sum up the various functions that the social sharing of emotion fulfils, or can fulfill. As will be apparent, there are many. Some of these functions have already been

submitted to empirical investigation, others are still completely open to investigation. In any case, most of the work needed to clarify social sharing manifestations remains to be conducted. I hope that the following overview will stimulate further research.

A first, very basic, function of emotion sharing is found in *rehearsing, reminding, or reexperiencing*. For positive emotions, rehearsing essentially serves the purpose of “capitalization.” Individuals can enhance their, and their targets’, current level of positive affect by retelling a positive emotional episode. For negative emotions, rehearsing can fulfill important functions with regard to the *memory* of emotional episodes. In the study of collective emotional events, social sharing emerged as part of a more general rehearsal process that also involved following news in the media. By talking about a public emotional event, people both constructed a collective memory of the event and consolidated their own memory of the personal circumstances under which they first heard about it (Finkenauer, Gisle & Luminet, 1997). The storage of episodic information which rehearsing favors is probably of high survival value in the case of personal emotional events.

The social sharing of emotion can cover many functions of the socio-affective kind. Such functions are well captured by laypersons, as was evidenced by the investigation of the motives they allege for sharing an emotional episode. As noted in Table 1, emotional sharing can be instrumental in *gaining social attention and interest from targets*, or in *arousing empathy among targets*. In line with such functions, emotional sharing appeared as a powerful tool for stimulating *bonding* and for *strengthening social ties*. In addition, laypersons were well aware of the various levels of help they can expect from targets when they share a negative emotional experience: these levels can include *help and support, comfort and consolation, legitimization and validation*, as well as reception of *advice and solutions*.

Besides these various socio-affective contributions, the social sharing of emotion can fulfill many functions of the cognitive or of the symbolic type. As was apparent from

investigations of alleged motives for sharing, these motives are much less obvious to lay observation. I will thus develop them in more detail.

First of all, emotion is a dense and diffuse experience in need of *cognitive articulation*. By using language and by addressing others, individuals “unfold” the emotional material, label it, and organize it into sequential relationships conforming to the rules of rational thinking (Rimé, 1983, 1987; Werner & Kaplan, 1967). Repetitive communication about an emotional experience lends itself to an evolution of its mental representation. For instance, script-like formats can be imposed upon the shared experience; some elements can be emphasized whereas others can be played down. The process of cognitive articulation can contribute to a *progressive distancing* from this experience and to adoption of a decentered point of view on the emotional material.

Next, emotion usually involves complex and unexpected eliciting circumstances, as well as the perception of a complex set of abundant and often ambiguous exteroceptive and interoceptive stimulations. As predicted by Festinger (1954), individuals confronted with ambiguous information look for clarification in their social environment. That such a *social comparison* process is aroused by emotional conditions was documented by Schachter’s (1959) work on the stress-affiliation effect. Other cognitive-social processes are likely to be involved in the social sharing of emotion. As emotions occur when forecasts fail, when expectations are disconfirmed, and when activities in progress are blocked, they generally bring forth a considerable loss of meaning (Weick, 1995). They challenge models and assumptions about oneself and the world that are held by individuals to preserve a sense of coherence, predictability, and control (e.g., Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Tait & Silver, 1989). Festinger (1957) argued that when prophecies fail, believers are motivated to develop a cognitive work of dissonance reduction. Cognitive dissonance research showed that people who engage in *dissonance reduction* typically initiate communication (e.g. Festinger, Riecken

& Schachter, 1956). The process of social sharing is well-suited to respond to the *quest for meaning* aroused by an emotion and to contribute to meaning production. In addition, *story-telling and the construction of a narrative* can be at play in the social sharing of emotion. As was stressed by Bruner (1990), unusual or exceptional circumstances stimulate the production of narration because it allows for the sketching of a world within a context where the encountered exception makes sense. Within the framework of a story, exceptions can be made comprehensible. In addition, emotional circumstances generally involve unfamiliar or atypical objects or events that are likely to shatter collective representations and shared knowledge. In line with Moscovici's (1984) views, the social sharing of emotion provides a frame in which *conversation* develops. Conversation can transform and absorb unfamiliar elements into *social representation*.

More generally, it was shown that emotional sharing propagates across a community. This collective process can contribute to the *construction and dissemination of social knowledge* about emotional episodes and emotional responses. Successive sharing rounds about the same episode probably involve a process analogous to Bartlett's (1932) "serial reproduction," which involves transmission of information through a chain of persons. Bartlett observed that participants in studies on serial reproduction (a) transformed the original material into a caricature, (b) changed meaningless aspects into meaningful ones, and (c) reconstructed transmitted information in a manner fitting their prior knowledge and expectations. These observations suggested to Bartlett the notion of *schemata*. Schemata liberate cognitive resources, allowing the person to focus on more novel and unexpected aspects of the incoming information.

### **What Does Emotion Research Gain from the Study of the Social Sharing of Emotion?**



Investigating the social sharing of emotion can change our view of what an emotion is in many respects.

In contrast to classic homeostatic views rooted in animal models of emotion, social sharing studies demonstrate that emotion is not a rapidly vanishing state bound to disappear as soon as the emotional circumstances vanish. Emotion impregnates the subsequent life of the affected persons. This impact can be long-lasting: the higher the intensity of the experience, the stronger its hold on later life. Thus, an emotional experience is only the starting point for important subsequent processes simultaneously involving cognitive, symbolic, affective and social aspects. In such a context, emotion emerges not as a problem or state of confusion, but as a response through which attention is allocated to the production of meaning. Contrary to common views, emotion is in no manner antagonistic to cognition. In the present context, emotions appear to be at the service of cognitive consistency and of meaning production. They signal the occurrence of cognitive discrepancies between the assumed state of the world and the current experience. They also exert a continuous motivational pressure on the person in the direction of discrepancy reduction. Emotions are thus manifested as playing a central role in the vicissitudes of human adaptation. They can be viewed as essential moments of potential evolution and growth in the individuals' life span. They contribute to expanding, adapting, transforming and repairing the individual's models, theories, assumptions and other views of themselves and the world.

The study of the social sharing of emotion generated many arguments that discard the Lone Ranger individualist perspective of adult emotional regulation. In sharp contrast with the latter perspective, much data revealed that an emotional experience is virtually indivisible of a social response. This response involves not only the need to be with others, as was foreseen by Stanley Schachter's (1959) pioneering work on stress and affiliation, but also the need to talk to others, to tell them what happened, and to share with them what was felt and

thought. When individuals experience difficulties or obstacles in reaching their goals, they urgently turn to other people around them with multiple demands. Emotion is thus revealed as a fundamentally interdependent process. It is in no manner limited to an internal process constrained within the boundaries of an affected individual.

I proposed that the social manifestations elicited by emotional episodes originated in attachment processes which were at play since infancy. According to my view, social responses elicited by emotion in adults are no less than mature forms of these early interdependent processes of emotional regulation. Thus, adults are not alone when they face an obstacle, a loss, or other difficulties signaled by emotion. In such circumstances, their deeply rooted social nature immediately comes into play. Even if the underlying motives differ radically, positive emotional experiences elicit exactly the same social orientation as negative ones. Theories of emotion will thus need to consider the fact that emotional circumstances are systematically sparking social communication among human beings. The available evidence now suggests that social responses following emotion can safely be added to the various manifestations—facial-expressive, physiologic, behavioral, cognitive, and phenomenal—traditionally regarded as the prototypical features of emotional responding.

Data from the study of the social sharing of emotion demonstrate the unexpected breadth of the social consequences of emotion. They not only reveal that interactants strengthen their ties and come close to one another by sharing emotion, they also show that a social sharing interaction is the beginning of a propagation process in which all the successive interactants experience similar effects for their own ties. Thus, the consequences of emotion are far from being limited to the individual who experienced it. On the contrary, emotion opens up processes that can enhance social integration and social cohesion within the larger community. By the same token, emotion appears to open up a communal spreading of emotional episodes through which individuals have lived, as well as of related questioning

and search for meaning. In this manner, every individual emotional experience acts as the potential source of a shared process of cognitive construction to which many contribute. Within the horizon of such findings, every individual emotion is to be conceived as another opportunity for contributing to the construction of culturally-shared protection tools, such as common sense, social knowledge, shared assumptions, and social representations. Thus, I want to conclude this review by stressing that emotions experienced by individuals are not only instruments at the service of individual adaptation, they are also major tools serving the adaptation of members of a community.

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Table 1 A synthesis of alleged motives for sharing an emotional episode  
(Rimé, 2007b)

<i>Classes of motives</i>	<i>Typical members of the class</i>
<b><i>Rehearsing</i></b>	<i>Reminding, re-experiencing, remembering</i>
<b><i>Venting</i></b>	<i>Expressing, looking for relief, letting off steam, alleviating, looking for catharsis</i>
<b><i>Help and support</i></b>	<i>Obtaining comfort, support, sympathy, help, receiving comprehension, being listened to</i>
<b><i>Comfort/consolation</i></b>	<i>Receiving consolation, receiving comfort</i>
<b><i>Legitimization, validation</i></b>	<i>Being legitimized, approved, understood</i>
<b><i>Clarification and meaning</i></b>	<i>Finding understanding, finding explanation, clarification, meaning</i>
<b><i>Advice and solutions</i></b>	<i>Obtaining advice, feedback, guidance, receiving the perspective of another person, receiving advice, finding solutions, suggestions</i>
<b><i>Bonding, strengthening social ties</i></b>	<i>Being in touch, relating, escaping loneliness or the feeling of abandonment, strengthening social ties, decreasing interpersonal distance, feeling closer to others</i>
<b><i>Arousing empathy</i></b>	<i>Touching/moving others, affecting the target, moving the listener</i>
<b><i>Gaining attention</i></b>	<i>Receiving attention, eliciting interest, impressing others, distinguishing oneself</i>
<b><i>Entertaining</i></b>	<i>“Lubricating” social interactions</i>

## Figure Captions

*Figure 1 (a)* Key elements in the dynamic of goal-pursuit in current life; *(b)* Multilevel consequences of emotional experiences.

*Figure 2.* A model of the temporal evolution of emotional memories.

*Figure 3.* Interpersonal dynamic of the social sharing of emotion.

*Figure 4.* The social sharing of emotion propagation wave (from Rimé, 2005)

*Figure 5.* A model of the double impact of a past negative emotional episode











